

Letters to the editor: 'I was wrong about Putin. I am sorry': ex Canadian ambassador to Russia

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Body

'I was wrong about Putin. I am sorry. I apologize'

Re: 'I was wrong': Ex-Canadian ambassador who called Putin among 'finest' leaders cuts Russia ties(<https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/ex-canadian-ambassador-who-called-putin-among-finest-leaders-quits-russian-firm-over-invasion>), Tom Blackwell, March 3

Through the 15 years of my retirement from the Canadian foreign service, I have been a critic of NATO expansion, which I regarded as counterproductively provocative, and an advocate of detente, of engagement with Russia and of prudent respect for its security interests along its borders. I have also defended the leadership of Russian President Vladimir Putin, believing that while he would not abide Ukrainian NATO membership, he could have Russia live in peace with an independent Ukraine.

I was wrong about Putin. I am sorry. I apologize.

Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine breaks my heart, the part of it I left in Kyiv when I finished my term as ambassador there 24 years ago. I watch and read the news these days with dread.

Though I fear for his and his people's fate, I have nothing but admiration for the leadership of President Volodymyr Zelenskyy and the courage of Ukrainians under ruthless attack.

As has been reported, I have severed my links with Russia, resigning last week from the board of Silver Bear Resources, which has built and now operates a silver mine in Yakutia.

I am grateful to Ukrainian-Canadian community leader Borys Wrzesnewskyj for saying that I have now done the right thing. Would that I'd seen the light and done so sooner.

Chris Westdal, Ottawa. (Former Canadian ambassador to Russia.)

Facing realities in today's world

Re: NP View: The West's anti-carbon obsession fuelled Putin's war against Ukraine(<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/np-view-the-wests-anti-carbon-obsession-fuelled-putins-war-against-ukraine>), Editorial, Feb. 26

As I have watched the terrible events unfold in Ukraine over the past week I have been humbled by true bravery of the Ukrainian people and I will admit I haven't felt more hope for humanity in some time. Not in the way world

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governments have responded with late coming sanctions, but in the way people of the Western nations seem to be waking up to the realities of the world we live in.

The remarkable courage of the Ukrainian people and their leadership in the face of an overwhelming force is something that stirs the heart. I doubt we would see a similar level of personal courage in Canada. Remembering how our prime minister hid in response to the peaceful protest in Ottawa without any outrage from Canadians, I'm sure of it.

We need to reflect on how Ukraine ended up in this situation. The Western world over the past decade has ran at full speed to the cliff's edge without considering the true costs to our misguided environmental policies. While we have gutted our north American energy sectors we have enriched some very dangerous nations to appease a misguided voting bloc. We live in our ivory towers in a false reality of a utopia that could only exist if the world did not have ruthless imperialists like Vladimir Putin or Xi Jinping. It is time for the fanatics who have taken control the environmental narrative to be displaced by sounder minds to plan a path forward that will not destroy our way of life.

A responsible path forward is needed. Canada is blessed with an abundance of fossil fuels. We need to utilize these resources in a responsible way to help develop technologies that are needed to meet the world's current and future energy needs. There are no technologies currently available that can replace all the cheap and abundant fossil fuel needed by the Western world and as importantly by less privileged nations. Anyone pushing this narrative is either naive or influencing policy for their own personal gains. I fear if we don't take some personal responsibility in Ukraine's current situation we will see more aggression in the near future.

It seems every generation needs a reminder that there is a cost to being able to be a free people. It is my sincere hope this is the spark.

Bill Oestreich, Dease Lake, B.C.

Letters to the editor: 'Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a crime against humanity'(<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor-russias-invasion-of-ukraine-is-a-crime-against-humanity>)

Letters to the Editor: 'This is not the Canada we fought two world wars for'(<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor-this-is-not-the-canada-we-fought-two-world-wars-for>)

'Putin is the antithesis of what those on the right are looking for'

Re: No love like first love for Canada's left-wing Putin apologists(<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/geoff-russ-no-love-like-first-love-for-canadas-left-wing-putin-apologists>), Geoff Russ, March 2

Geoff Russ writes, "There probably are some right-wingers who like Putin, and would carry water for him" If an individual identifies as right-wing, he or she probably believes in individual freedom and minimal government intervention in their lives. Putin is the antithesis of what those on the right are looking for. Russ does point out in his article that several individuals who identify with the NDP do not blame Putin for the current aggression. This support for Putin among left-wing individuals is understandable even though it is hard to fathom.

Rick Hird, Whitby, Ont.

'We feel their pain'

Re: Some Canadians want to answer Ukraine's call for foreign fighters(<https://nationalpost.com/news/some-canadians-want-to-answer-ukraines-call-for-foreign-fighters>), Feb. 28

I watch with tears in my eyes as a beautiful country is being destroyed. Despite President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's inspiring leadership, and his brave military and people, one can see them slowly being overwhelmed by Russia's superior military firepower.

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I'm now old, and grey, and can only stand on a corner with a sign saying "Honk For The Brave Ukrainians, F-k Putin", but I hope Ukrainians, and Ukrainian Canadians realize we feel their pain, knowing they're watching their homeland being destroyed, and their people killed, by the brutal dictator Putin and his Russian war machine.

Peter J. Middlemore Sr, Windsor, Ont.

An aerial view shows a residential building destroyed by shelling in Borodyanka as Russia's invasion of Ukraine continues, March 3, 2022.

'How would Canada react to an invasion from the north by Russia?'

Re: Canada needs the ability to defend itself in an increasingly uncertain world(<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/tasha-kheiriddin-canada-needs-the-ability-to-defend-itself-in-an-increasingly-uncertain-world>), Tasha Kheiriddin, March 2; and This was never just Ukraine's fight - Canada is vulnerable to Russia in the North(<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/peter-mackay-this-was-never-just-ukraines-fight-canada-is-vulnerable-to-russia-in-the-north>), Peter MacKay, Feb. 27

Back in the '80s I travelled on a Russian research vessel along the Northwest Passage. This vessel had a huge hammer and sickle emblazoned on its funnel. We stopped overnight in Arctic Bay, visited the school in the evening and bought souvenirs from the school kids, waved goodbye in the morning. During our voyage we didn't see any Canadian military presence, no RCMP and no sign of hostility from any of the people, just curiosity.

How would, could or should Canada react to an invasion from the north by the Russian military?

Fred Loftin, Toronto

'If the UN and NATO really want to stop a third world war, send in the troops'

Re: At the UN, 'a dramatic feeling that something needs to be done' this time(<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/john-ivison-at-the-un-a-dramatic-feeling-that-something-needs-to-be-done-this-time>), John Ivison, Feb. 28; and One in four support Canadian Armed Forces joining the fight against Russia, poll finds(<https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/one-in-four-support-canadian-armed-forces-joining-the-fight-against-russia-poll-finds>), March 1

I was born in Warsaw, Poland, in 1938; we escaped from behind the Iron Curtain in 1947, so I know of what I speak. If all the nations had had the fortitude to stop Hitler when he invaded Poland we would not have had the Second World War.

Did we learn nothing from that period? The West amassed a force of 250,000 with a full complement of the best armour in Kuwait within just a few weeks to protect our oil sources. In Ukraine, millions of people are at risk and all we send is some ammunition and protective gear. If the UN and NATO really want to stop a third world war, send in the troops in a massive form and cut the head off the snake before it becomes unmanageable. The Ukrainian people will pay a heavy price for our indecision. The rest of the world will pay dearly for many years to come.

Leslie Jedrychowski, Thetford Mines, Que.

I don't care that Ukraine isn't a member of NATO. A few well-placed (and subsequently denied) F-35 missile strikes on that column approaching Kyiv would stop Putin in his tracks. We have a few of those aircraft in the RCAF, and I'm sure a few pilots who would enjoy the task. Putin won't launch a nuclear war. His senior military commanders don't want global genocide or a radioactive Russia; their problem is simply a lack of backbone to remove him.

T.L. Pedneault-Peasland, Victoria, B.C.

Shame on the NHL

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Re: Russian star Alex Ovechkin: 'Please, no more war'(<https://nationalpost.com/pmn/sports-pmn/russian-star-alex-ovechkin-please-no-more-war>), Feb. 25

It is shameful that the NHL has not suspended and fined the Washington Capitals' Alexander Ovechkin for failing to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Why isn't the NHL following the lead of the International Paralympic Committee, FIFA, UEFA, the International Ice Hockey Federation and all the other leading sports organizations in the world and banning Russians from playing, and making Russians ineligible for the NHL draft for as long as Russian troops remain in Ukraine? By doing and saying nothing, I can only assume the NHL supports Russia and its killing machine. Disgraceful and disgusting.

Wasył Wysoczanskyj, Toronto

Ukraine's brave leader

Re: Volodymyr Zelenskyy's last stand: 'We are in Kyiv. We defend Ukraine'(<https://nationalpost.com/news/world/ukrainian-president-volodymyr-zelenskyys-last-stand>), Jessica Mundie, Feb. 25

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's courageous leadership has transformed him into the de facto leader of what we once called the "free world." Thanks to him, the West finally awoke to the danger that Vladimir Putin's revanchism poses to its values and institutions. His bravery has rallied the West to impose sanctions on Russia and provide weapons to Ukraine beyond anything thought possible before. His influence will live on long after Putin's mad war against Ukraine, and may even lead to what the world needs most; regime change in Russia.

Patrick Bendin, Ottawa

The difference between Volodymyr Zelenskyy and Justin Trudeau is that while Trudeau hid from the "onslaught" of peaceful Canadian truck drivers and their families, Zelenskyy faces head-on the horrendously massive military might of Russia, which is likely intending to either kill or capture him.

Bill Gruenthal, Burnaby

It seems that Vladimir Putin has completed his transition into becoming Adolf Hitler. Is it possible that Volodymyr Zelenskyy is becoming Winston Churchill? If so, let's hope that history can repeat itself.

Dennis Empson, Etobicoke, Ont.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy calls on the West to increase military aid to Ukraine, during a press conference on March 3, 2022, in Kyiv.

Essential that Canada beefs up defence spending

Re: Are we ready to confront the malignant narcissist Putin?(<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/john-ivison-are-we-ready-to-confront-the-malignant-narcissist-putin>) John Ivison, Feb. 25

Canada has been facing a crisis over the rundown of its defence policy and armed forces since the Pierre Trudeau administration starting in the 1970s and sustained since then by Liberal governments led by Jean Chr tien and Justin Trudeau. Paul Martin decided to raise the level of defence spending but was defeated before implementing it.

The Conservatives under Stephen Harper, acting in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks, provided increased funding and applied it to rebuild diverse capabilities necessary to fight the war in Afghanistan. However, the Canadian combat contribution was of minimal size and effectiveness and was in the end replaced by a training force.

These negative results were driven by two factors: the failure of governments to convince Canadians of the necessity to invest in defence to guarantee national well-being; and, the efforts of anti-military factions in political

parties and the bureaucracy to keep defence spending to a minimum and avoid participation in combat operations. A key development that solidified this process was a Cabinet decision in 1973 to deny special status to the Department of National Defence and members of the Canadian Armed Forces. Henceforth they would be treated as part of the federal civil service.

Direct negative effects included: abolition of the Department of Defence Production and relegation of the defence procurement process to the impossible complexity of the general government version; undermining previous legitimate benefits to veterans; and, reduction of the crucial "service before self" concept implanted in the minds of military members.

Resolution of this Canadian defence imbroglio has suddenly become essential in view of the emerging crisis in Ukraine. Canadian military contributions amount to too little too late and will be unsustainable in the longer term. Immediate action should include rescinding the 1973 Cabinet decision and raising the defence budget to the NATO target of two per cent of GDP.

A.S. Henry, Colonel (Ret'd), Ottawa

The Sierra Club responds to Rex Murphy

Re: 'Greenism' has helped Putin fuel his war machine(<https://nationalpost.com/opinion/rex-murphy-greenism-has-helped-putin-fuel-his-war-machine>), Rex Murphy, March 1

Rex Murphy's take on climate action is analogous to captured Russian soldiers who are unaware that they are engaged in a real war in Ukraine - as opposed to a military exercise. Contrary to the opinion expressed in this piece, the threat of climate change is real, and its effects are on our very doorsteps.

The IPCC Sixth Assessment Report(<https://www.ipcc.ch/report/ar6/wg2/>) released on Feb. 28 on climate impacts on human well-being makes it very clear that those who do not confront the climate crisis and protect the life systems we rely on will doom billions of people to misery and potentially more bloodshed. Increasing our reliance on fossil fuels and more pipelines runs contrary to global security, and will only make us more vulnerable. As with the collapse of the cod fishery in Newfoundland, which Murphy reported on with such empathy at the time, not listening to science in time will only add to the destructive cost of inaction.

Like Russian soldiers punching holes in oil tanks of their own vehicles because they do not want to engage in war in Ukraine, renewables, energy storage, and energy savings will take the power from those who are currently holding the world at ransom for the profit of the few. Mr. Murphy, just like Russian soldiers in Ukraine, you've been lied to. This is not a drill.

Gretchen Fitzgerald, National Programs Director, Sierra Club Canada Foundation

The real problem with long-term care homes

"Re: Long-term care needs competition, not more red tape(<https://financialpost.com/opinion/opinion-long-term-care-needs-competition-not-more-red-tape>)", Yanick Labrie, Feb. 24

You would have to be doing some serious moral and ethical gymnastics to say the only problem with the way long-term care was managed during the pandemic was that not enough people made money off the suffering of our elderly and loved ones. But that seems to be the argument Yanick Labrie from the Fraser Institute makes.

The problem with long-term care is not a lack of profit, or a lack of competition - it is a surplus of greed that leads to penny-pinching and corner-cutting in matters of life and death.

The facts are clear: for-profit LTC homes saw almost double the average death rate of not-for-profit homes and almost five times higher than public homes due to COVID-19 in Ontario. Private LTC homes see far higher rates of hospital admission. The workers in for-profit get paid less, have heavier workloads, and turn over at a far higher

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rate. For CUPE's 90,000 members who work in long-term care, these aren't just statistics; they know these realities first-hand.

Long-term care is health care, and in Canada, health care should be universal. The way forward for this sector is not chasing new revenue streams for shareholders. The way forward is through implementing rigorous national standards to protect our parents and grandparents and loved ones, and to keep care home operators in check. The way forward is through ending the rampant profiteering in the sector that is responsible for thousands of deaths since March 2020, by making long-term care public and nonprofit.

Mark Hancock, National President, Canadian Union of Public Employees (CUPE)

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